12 C.*h

he Duty of Publick Worſhip.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED at the

Opening of the New-Church

OF

St. *Botolph Biſhopſgate*;

DECEMBER 1, 1728.

By JOSEPH WATSON, D.D.
Lecturer of the ſaid CHURCH, and *Rector* of St. *Stephen's* in *Walbrook*.

Publiſh'd at the Requeſt of the VESTRY of St. *Botolph Biſhopſgate*.

LONDON:
Printed for GEORGE STRAHAN, at the *Golden-Ball*, over-againſt the ROYAL-EXCHANGE, *Cornhill*. 1728.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED at the

Opening of the New-Church

MVSEVM
BRITAN
NICVM

By JOSEPH WATSON, D. D.

Lecturer of the said CHURCH, and
Rector of St. Stephens in Walbrook.

Publish'd at the Request of the VESTRY of
St. Stephens Walbrook.

LONDON:

Printed for GEORGE STRAHAN, at the
Golden-Ball over-against the Royal-Exchange,
MDCCXXIII.

TO THE

Right WORSHIPFUL

AND

OTHERS the WORTHY

INHABITANTS

OF

St. *Botolph Biſhopſgate*,

THIS

DISCOURSE

Is humbly DEDICATED,

By *their moſt obliged,*

humble Servant,

and LECTURER,

J. W.

B

TO THE

Right Worshipful

AND

Other the Worthy

INHABITANTS

OF

St. Botolph Bishopsgate,

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DISCOURSE

Is humbly DEDICATED,

By their most obliged,

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and LECTURER,

J. W.

HEB. X. 25.

Not forſaking the aſſembling of our ſelves together, as the Manner of ſome is.

IT is not in the leaſt to be wonder'd at, that we find the Apoſtle here blaming ſome for forſaking the Chriſtian Aſſemblies, and cautioning others not to follow their Example; when we conſider how early the Church fell into Perſecution, and that this was the Caſe in view when he penn'd theſe Words.

That the Church was then perſecuted appears, I think, from *v.* 36. of this Chapter, where theſe Converts are told, that they *have need of Patience that after they have done the Will of God they might receive the Promiſe*; as likewiſe from *v.* 32. where, to encourage them to perſevere in the Faith, they are put in mind of their former Trials, which they had laudably ſuſtained; and again from the Words that immediately follow the Text; which are theſe, *but exhorting one another, and ſo much the more, as ye*

ſee the Day approaching, i. e. fortifying and encouraging one another to perſevere under your Sufferings, with the near Proſpect of that Day, in which ye expect your Lord will come, according to his Promiſe, to avenge himſelf on our unbelieving Nation, and to deliver you that have been faithful to Him, from the Hatred and Malice of your Brethren.

THIS being the Caſe of theſe *Hebrew* Converts, it is not in the leaſt to be wonder'd at, I ſay, that the Apoſtle ſhould have occaſion to addreſs himſelf to them, as he doth, in the Text: that he ſhould think it highly neceſſary *at ſuch Time* to beſpeak their Attendance at the Publick Aſſemblies, and that he had room given him to animadvert on ſome that forſook them.

BUT methinks it is greatly to be wonder'd at, as well as much to be lamented, that the Paſtors of the Church ſhould have the ſame Occaſions given them *in theſe Days*: Now that the Faith hath triumph'd over its Perſecutors, and *Kings* are become *its nurſing Fathers and Queens its nurſing Mothers*: Now that the open Profeſſion of it is ſo far from expoſing us to any kind of Suffering, that we cannot diſavow it, but at the Peril of our Reputations, and to our manifeſt Prejudice in every other Reſpect: Eſpecially that this ſhould be the Caſe here in our own Country, where the Faith is not only receiv'd, protected and encouraged by the Civil Power; but likewiſe happily purged of all thoſe Errors with which it had been corrupted; and may therefore be publickly profeſt by us, with as much ſafety in reſpect of our Con-

Conſciences, as of any thing elſe that perſonally concerns us.

And yet who ſees not, that this is actually our Caſe notwithſtanding? nay, who ſees not that our preſent Paſtors, in exhorting their Flocks not to forſake the aſſembling of themſelves together, may even enlarge the Apoſtle's Complaint, and ſay, Not as the manner of *ſome*, but as the manner of *many* is? For is it not grown almoſt into a Faſhion with us, eſpecially among Perſons of Rank and Diſtinction, to diſuſe the publick Worſhip, as if it were either a leſſening to their Quality, or a reproach to their Underſtandings, to be ſeen in ſuch Aſſemblies? As if it were, I ſay, for God be praiſed the Caſe is not really ſo. No Man profeſſes his Belief in Chriſt amongſt us to his Diſadvantage in any Reſpect; he neither incurs any Penalty, nor loſes any Eſteem by it; which yet is more than can be ſaid in the behalf of ſuch as refuſe to join in the publick Teſtimony of it, by not appearing in our Aſſemblies. For do they not affront herein the publick Wiſdom and Authority of the Nation? which could not be done with Impunity in any Caſe, were the Laws duly executed. At leaſt, do they not ſubject themſelves to be cenſured by their Neighbours as Atheiſts or Infidels? Characters that ſtill are, and I hope ever will be, held in the utmoſt Abhorrence by the generality of us.

If then it was a Crime in ſome of theſe Converts to withdraw themſelves from the Chriſtian Aſſemblies for fear of Perſecution, a Crime too that in the Apoſtle's Judgment amounted to a renouncing of the

Faith; and accordingly he ſpeaks of it here in ſuch dreadful Terms, as can't be well apply'd to any, but ſuch as have put themſelves into that deplorable State; (as you may ſee throughout the remaining Part of this Chapter) What muſt we think of ſuch amongſt ourſelves as do this out of meer Choice, and without any viſible Temptation: Nay, as we have already obſerv'd, in direct Oppoſition to Publick Authority, and to the manifeſt Hazard of their good Names, with a multitude of other Inconveniencies? Nothing ſurely that can encourage them to perſevere in what they do, be their Motives to it what they will.

THESE, I am apt to think, are not the ſame with all of them, nor do I take the Caſe of them all to be either equally wicked, or equally dangerous; yet dangerous enough too, how favourably ſoever you ſuppoſe it circumſtanc'd, to make it the Duty of every Paſtor to warn them of it.

SOME there are, no doubt, who forſake our Aſſemblies out of pure Infidelity, having renounc'd their Baptiſmal Covenant in their Hearts, and private Converſation, though they have not yet ventured to do it publickly to the World. By theſe I mean the Men who love to diſtinguiſh themſelves among their Acquaintance by the Name of Deiſts, *i. e.* Perſons that would be thought to acknowledge a God, but deny his eternal Son *Jeſus Chriſt*, and that God hath at any Time reveal'd his Will to Mankind thro' him, or any other Prophet; or indeed any other Way, than by that Law which is written on all our Hearts.

THAT

That there are such Men among us a good Christian would not willingly believe, because he can't account for it without a hard Censure: But he must be strangely ignorant of the present Generation, that can make the least Doubt of their being numerous. And if we find our Christian Assemblies lessen'd by the withdrawing of these, no Wonder. I know no Business they have there; except it be to carp at what they hear, or to play the Hypocrite for some worldly Ends; which is a Conduct not to be justified, even on their own Principles, if they really believe a God; for he must necessarily detest and punish all Insincerity. So that I take them to be in the right, not to give their Attendance; nor can any Christian Pastor reasonably expect it, or honestly go about to exhort them to it, so long as they remain under their present Perswasion.

We may, and indeed ought, whensoever we meet with them, to set before them the Evidences of Christianity in the best manner we are able; and endeavour, at the same Time to make them sensible of the great Danger they have manifestly put themselves into, by rejecting a Mediator and Redeemer, and trusting for their Salvation only to the Integrity of their own Actions; when the very best Men among them cannot but be conscious to themselves, that their Lives will not bear to be try'd by that Law they profess to walk, and hope to be saved by. But if, by Applications of this Kind, we can't prevail with them to embrace the Truth, I don't apprehend that we have any thing further to do, than to continue our Prayers for them, that God would give them his Grace duly and impartially to consider

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the Evidence with which his Gospel is attended; *that he would open their Eyes, and turn them from Darkness to Light, and from the Power of Satan unto God.*

As to our endeavouring to bring them into our Christian Assemblies, With what Consistency can we do this, so long as they disown the very Name of Christ? Would we have them to attend upon a Worship which they account idolatrous? Would we have them to reverence him outwardly as God, whom in their Hearts they esteem to be no more than Man: Nay, a wicked and blasphemous Impostor, in falsely pretending to be God. These therefore we must pass over in Discourses of this Nature, leaving them to themselves and *the righteous Judgment of God.*

But there are others, and they not a few too, who, though they have not given up their Belief in Christ, do yet need much to be call'd upon to attend the Christian Assemblies: Such are they that have either totally forsaken them, or but seldom appear at them; not because they think it either unlawful, or inexpedient constantly to attend them, but purely for want of being thoroughly apprized of their Obligations so to do. These, 'tis to be hoped, may be reclaim'd by having those Obligations laid before them; and it is for their Use and Benefit that I intend this Discourse; wherein I shall undertake to shew the Necessity of worshiping God in Publick,

I. From the Nature and Reason of Divine Worship in general.

II. From God's positive Institutions concerning it.

III. From

III. FROM the very Being and OEconomy of the Christian Church.

AND, First, from the Nature and Reason of Divine Worship in general. I take it for granted here, that every Creature endued with Reason, consents, that God ought to be worship'd; for this is evidently the first Dictate of Reason, commencing as soon as we apprehend what and whence we are. The only thing in question then is, Whether this Worship ought to be perform'd Publickly, or it be sufficient to do it Privately? Now, though it must be confess'd to be a Duty, on many Accounts, to worship God in Private; yet, I think, it may plainly appear to every one that considers the Nature of Divine Worship in general, *viz.* What it is, or wherein it consists, that it ought to be perform'd publickly too.

FOR what is it we mean by the Worship of God, but such Acts as do immediately declare our Love, Fear, and Reverence of him; our Faith, Hope, Trust, and Affiance in him; our Obedience, Gratitude and Resignation towards him? In short, What is it we mean by it, but such Acts, both of Body and Mind, as are thought to honour him, by testifying the great Sense we have of his Soveraign Majesty, Power, Wisdom, Goodness, and our own humble Dependance on him? All which we do, when we conceive great and awful Notions of his Being; when we pray to him for the Supply of our Wants; when we thank, praise, and magnify him for his Mercies, and the like; and therefore it is, that, while we are thus employ'd, we are said to be worshiping God.

Now

Now if the Nature of God's Worſhip conſiſts in our honouring him, that muſt certainly be the moſt acceptable Way of worſhiping him, which tends *moſt* to his Honour, and that is, doing it in *ſolemn and publick Aſſemblies*; for by this we take away all Suſpicion of our being either afraid or aſham'd of our Duty to him; and not only ſo, but many ſeeing and marking our Devotion, may be influenc'd thereby to glorify their Maker more abundantly.

It was, we may ſuppoſe, from ſome ſuch Conſiderations as theſe, that holy *David* took up his Reſolution to make his Praiſes of God as publick as he could. *I will declare thy Name*, ſays he, *unto my Brethren, in the midſt of the Congregation will I praiſe thee*, *Pſal.* xxii. 22. And elſewhere he exhorts others to do the like, *viz. To exalt him in the Congregation of the People, and to praiſe him in the Aſſembly of the Elders*; and again, ſays he, *Praiſe ye the Lord: I will praiſe him with my whole Heart, in the Aſſembly of the Upright, and in the Congregation*, Pſ. cvii. 32. Pſ. cxi. 1.

Beſides this, we may conſider, That as there are two Parts of Worſhip, the one Internal, by which we bow our Souls before God, and the other external, by which we give viſible Signs of our inward Devotion; ſuch as bowing our Bodies, uncovering our Heads, kneeling, praying, and praiſing God with an audible Voice, and the like: So the chief Uſe of this latter Part of Worſhip is for Publick Aſſemblies.

We may, and indeed we ought, to uſe outward Reverence towards God, even in our private Devotion: Nay,

Nay, 'twill naturally flow, at such Times, from a Sense of the Duty we are upon, and of his awful Majesty, *with whom we have to do*, if we are rightly prepared to come before him. But then the Design of it here is not to testify our Devotion either to God, or Man: For if we design it to testify this to Man, this would be acting the Part of the *Pharisees*, who were blamed by our Saviour, for ordering their private Devotions so as *to be seen of Men*: If we design it to testify the same to God, this would be conceiving a low and very unworthy Notion of his Being; as if he, who sees the inward more plainly than we do the outward Man, could possibly need such an Help to become acquainted with our Hearts.

The outward Part of Worship, therefore, cannot be practised to that End and Purpose for which it is chiefly insisted on by God, *viz.* the spreading and promoting of his Glory, thro' the Testimony which we thereby give to others of the Honour and Affection which we ourselves do inwardly bear him, but on Supposition that he is to be worship'd in publick and solemn Assemblies; for there only we are allowed to make a Shew of our Devotion, there only it is, that such Discoveries can be of any Service to Religion, so that we must either conclude, that this Part of God's Worship, which the Scriptures make so essential to it, that they commonly express the whole of it in Terms that, strictly speaking, relate to this Part only, is in a great measure unnecessary, or else that it is our Duty to worship God in Publick.

AGAIN, the *Reason* on which Divine Worship is naturally grounded, declares for its being publick. For what is this Reason? but that God is our Creator, Preserver and Benefactor; and doth not this as evidently demand our publick as our private Devotions? 'Tis true, He is all this with Respect to each particular Man, and his Providence adapts his Mercies to the particular Circumstances of us all; and therefore every Man hath his particular Reasons for the Worship of Him, which is the ground of all private Devotion: But doth it follow from hence, that we owe Him no *Publick* Devotion? Is not He all this in Common to us all, as well as to each particular Man? Doth not He bestow publick Blessings on us, and prevent, or remove publick Evils from us, as well as private? What think you of the Influences of Heaven and the Fruitfulness of the Earth, of the Blessings of national Peace and Plenty, of Deliverance from our publick Enemies, of the Advantages of good Government, and above all of the Redemption of Mankind, by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? Are not these Mercies of a publick Nature, and therefore worthy of our publick Acknowledgements? Or do we think the private Devotions of the Closet a proper, suitable, or sufficient Return for them? The *Psalmist* when he celebrates the publick Mercies of God, invites *all Israel* to join in His Praises. *Praise ye the Lord, sing unto the Lord a new Song, and his Praise in the Congregation of the Saints. Let Israel rejoice in him that made him. Let the Children of Sion be joyful in their King.* Ps. 149. v. 1, 2.

And

And we find that it hath been the Practice of all Nations, how much soever they have differed in the Object of their Worship, to agree in making it Publick and Solemn; so that to lay this Custom aside, and to substitute private Devotion instead of it, is to forget that God is a publick Benefactor, to slight the Example of his own People, nay of all the Nations in the World besides, and consequently to disobey the Voice of Nature it self.

But furthermore, can we imagine that Man was made a sociable Creature for Civil Concerns only? Doth not the Affair of Religion, and the immortal Comforts that depend upon the true Profession of it, as much deserve our united Care and Endeavours, as the fading transitory Things of this lower World? What would our Civil Interests be worth, or how could such fleeting short-liv'd Dependencies deserve the Care we bestow upon them, were they not necessary to pass us into the Possession of our heavenly Inheritance? And doth not Experience teach us, that we should be apt to wander out of the Way, so as to lose the Sight of this Inheritance, were not the Care of it made a publick and common Concern? We see the Truth of this Observation too plainly in the Effects of those late Writings, which have taken Occasion, from the Lenity of our Government, to dispute all Church Authority, and to make Religion a meer personal Thing; for is it not manifest, that a great deal of the Infidelity which at this Time prevails so much among us, is owing thereto? Is it not by reason of these Attempts to destroy all Church-

Communion, and to make People believe that Salvation depends, exclusive hereof, upon the Sincerity of each private Opinion, that the common Faith is so much ridiculed and exploded, and that its divine Author hath in no Part of Christendom, less Honour than in this Nation; which otherwise on Account of the Purity in which his Religion is publickly Taught among us, might properly enough be called *his own Country, his own Kin, and his own House*?

Secondly, we are assured, that the publick Worship of God is a Duty from his own positive Institutions concerning it. For all the Directions he gave to *Moses* concerning the Tabernacle, concerning the Priests, concerning the Sacrifices, concerning the Sabbath and Feasts, were Institutions of a publick Nature, and supposed his Worship, to which they all related, to be a publick Worship. The Tabernacle and afterwards the Temple were the Places, at which the People, were all appointed to assemble publickly to Worship Him. The Priests were publick Persons, ordained to officiate for all the People there assembled. The Sacrifices were to be offered by them in a publick Manner, as well those brought by private Persons on particular Occasions, as those that were offered for the whole Congregation: Such as the daily Sacrifices every Morning and Evening, and that also on the great Day of Expiation. The Sabbath, the New-Moons and annual Festivals, when all the Males were to appear Three times a Year before the Lord, were all instituted publick Times of Worship; so that there can be no doubt but it was the Will of God to be worshiped publickly,

during

during the *Jewiſh Church*, for it would have been abſurd to have appointed publick Perſons, publick Offices, publick Places, publick Times and Seaſons for private Worſhip, which might have been more conveniently performed by leaving it to every Man to take his own Time and Place for it, as he found himſelf properly diſpoſed. To be ſure how acceptable our private Devotion on proper Occaſions may be, it can never be thought to anſwer the Deſign of ſuch publick Appointments as theſe, nor rightly to ſanctify the Days that are ſet apart by them: And therefore we don't find that it was ever made an Excuſe by *that People*, for the Neglect of any of the publick Ordinances, though it was oftentimes both troubleſome and expenſive to attend them.

FOR they conſidered God as their King, and the publick Ordinances of their Religion as His Laws, which He had given them no Power to diſpenſe with. And ſo ought Chriſtians too, for they are no more at Liberty in this Caſe than the *Jews* were. God hath indeed, enlarged his Dominion, which before He exerciſed over the *Jews* only, and is now become the King of all the Earth. I mean he hath now invited all Nations into his Church, which is the only viſible Kingdom He hath among Men; but doth this hinder, that He ſhould not expect the ſame Obedience to the Laws of it now, that He did while it was confined to the *Jews*? One of which is, that He will ſtill be worſhipped publickly. For though He hath aboliſhed the Rites and Ceremonies wherewith his publick Worſhip was then performed, and ſubſtituted

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others in their Room; yet He hath no where declared for the Ceſſation of publick Worſhip; but on the contrary, hath plainly intimated his Will to have it continued, and promiſed that his Preſence ſhall propitiouſly attend on our Chriſtian Aſſemblies, lawfully met in Obedience to Him, as it formerly did on the *Jewiſh*. For the Promiſe then was, *In all Places where I record my Name, I will come unto thee, and I will bleſs thee*, Exod. xx. 24. So now it is *whereſoever*, i. e. whether at *Jeruſalem* as before, or in any other Place, *two or three*, i. e. any indefinite Number, *of you are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midſt of you*, Mat. xviii. 20.

But Thirdly, That publick Worſhip is the Duty of all Chriſtians, may be proved not only from this Promiſe of our Saviour, which continues, or rather conveys the Inſtitution of it to the Chriſtian Church; but likewiſe from the very Being and OEconomy of that Church.

For, in the firſt Place, if we conſider what the Church nakedly and ſimply is, we can have no other Conception of it but of a Number of People call'd together, and choſen out of the unbelieving World, to profeſs the Faith of Chriſt, and to worſhip God according to the Inſtructions which Chriſt gave. Now a Number of People, call'd out of the World to worſhip God after the ſame manner, and with Unity and Conſent touching any Inſtructions given them for that End, muſt in all Reaſon be ſuppos'd to do this by meeting and aſſembling together: Eſpecially ſince that was the ancient Method of worſhiping God all

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the World over, before this new Religion appear'd; and there is nothing in its Doctrines to the contrary, or that ſeems to prefer private Devotion before it. By meeting and aſſembling together I ſay, for how ſhould this Unity and Conſent, which are ſo neceſſary to the Truth of the Worſhip, be preſerv'd without it? we ſhould be apt to run into ſingular Conceits and Practices about this Matter, if ſuch Novelties were not prevented by our meeting jointly to tranſact it, But ſuppoſing it poſſible to avoid this Miſchief, yet how could it be known that we actually had avoided it, ſo as each particular Chriſtian might have the Comfort of being ſatisfy'd that he perform'd the Duty right? And if even this might poſſibly be by the Help of the Scriptures, yet no Man ſurely that conſiders how ready Men are to put private Interpretations upon the plaineſt Texts, when they are neceſſary to countenance their particular Opinions, will ſay, that Unity and Conſent in Worſhip are not in danger of being loſt without publick Aſſemblies; and therefore they are, at leaſt, highly expedient, if not abſolutely neceſſary to the preſerving of them. So that if we only allow that the All-wiſe God hath acted in this Affair by Meaſures beſt adapted to the Ends propoſed, publick Worſhip muſt be imply'd even in the ſimpleſt Notion we can have of the Chriſtian Church.

But if we conſider it under that metaphorical one, which the Scriptures give us of it, when they call it Chriſt's *Body*, and the ſeveral Chriſtians that compoſe it, the Members of that Body. (*Now ye are the Body of Chriſt, and Members*

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in particular, 1 Cor. xii. 27.) This will ſtill farther convince us, that Chriſtians are bound to worſhip God in Communion: That all the Offices of the Faith are ſocial Offices, and this more eſpecially ſo, ſince 'tis the principal Act by which Chriſtians declare themſelves to be what they are. For why is the Church repreſented as a Body? but to ſignify to us its Unity, and that this Unity ariſes from an Agreement among Chriſtians, as that of the natural Body does from the apt Conjunction and Co-operation of its ſeveral Members: And what can that Agreement be, which unites Chriſtians ſo as to make them one Church or ſpiritual Body? but their joining together in the Performance of thoſe Offices for which they were incorporated, and therefore ſurely in the Worſhip of God, which is none of the meaneſt of thoſe Offices.

It hath been ſaid, I know, that this Unity conſiſts in their holding one Faith, and having a mutual Love and Charity for one another, and it muſt be own'd that it doth partly conſiſt in this, but not wholly. Men may hold the ſame Faith, and yet have bitter Diſputes one with another, even ſuch as ſhall deſtroy their Charity; a Proof of which were the *Novations* and *Donatiſts* of old, who differ'd not about Matters of Faith, but Diſcipline. And if you deſire a modern one, you have it in the Diſputes amongſt ourſelves. Nay, Men may hold the ſame Faith, and exerciſe a mutual Charity and Forbearance too, without being Members of the ſame Body; whereas the Unity which ought to be among Chriſtians is ſuch (as we have already obſerv'd to you) as makes them one Body, *i. e.*

one

one Church; as well as to agree in the ſame Faith, and to act with the ſame Spirit of Love. And ſince we have ſhew'd there can be no ſuch Thing as one Church, or ſpiritual Body, without Agreement in the ſame common Worſhip, which cannot be celebrated but by the Members of it aſſembling themſelves together; therefore for any Chriſtian not to come to theſe Aſſemblies to bear his Part in their publick and ſolemn Devotions, is to break the Unity of the Church he pretends to be of, and to cut himſelf off from its Society. For a Man can no longer be ſaid to belong to a Society, than he continues to perform the Acts that are eſſential to it, and neceſſary to diſtinguiſh it.

Now the Church as ſuch is diſtinguiſh'd by its publick Acts only. Private Acts of Faith may denominate a Man a Believer, but they don't declare him a Member of the Church. This is done by ſuch Acts only as are proper to a Church, which are all of them publick Teſtimonies, and done in Communion with its Members; which is not the Caſe of private Devotion, how orthodox, or how zealous ſoever it may be ſuppoſed.

It is one Thing to believe the Chriſtian Religion to be true, and another to be a Member of that Church. The former may be the Caſe of a Man that hath never been baptized, *i. e.* admitted into the Church; and we don't call him a Member of the Church that hath not been admitted into it. In like Manner, private Worſhip, according to the Chriſtian Faith, may be an Argument that the Man that uſes it believes in Chriſt, but it can never be an Argument that he is a Member

of his Church, or belongs to that Body which is called Christ's, till he joins in those publick Acts that constitute that Body.

HENCE it is that the Scripture in other Places, calls this Body a Communion, or Fellowship, to signify to us, that we ought not to reckon ourselves to be of it, without living in Communion, and joining with the rest of the Society in those Offices, and participating of those Ordinances which are the spiritual Cement of it. For thus saith St. *John*, *that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye may have Fellowship with us*, or be admitted into Communion and Society with us, as the Word in the original imports, *and truly our Fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ*, 1 *John*, Chap. i. Verse 3. intimating hereby, that the Way to have Communion with God and Christ, is first to be in Communion with the Church. The same Instruction is also given us in the Example of the first Converts to the Faith, as you may see in the 2d Chapter of the *Acts*. These did not think it sufficient for the Purposes of Salvation to profess the Faith privately and separately, but they enter'd presently into Communion for that End, and so laid the Foundation, on which the Christian Church, consider'd as a Society, hath stood ever since. *They continued stedfastly in the Apostles Doctrine and Fellowship, and in breaking of Bread and in Prayers. They continued daily with one Accord in the Temple. They broke Bread from House to House, and did eat their Meat with Gladness and singleness of Heart. i. e.* They did every thing

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neceſſary to the Worſhip of Chriſt in publick Communion, with great Joy, and perfect Conſent of Heart and Voice. Thus you ſee the Duty of publick Worſhip among Chriſtians grounded on the very Being of a Chriſtian Church: Whether we conſider it under the metaphorical Notion of a *Body*, or a *Communion*, or under the moſt plain and ſimple Notion of it, as it is a Number of People call'd out of the World for the Profeſſion of the true Faith and Worſhip of God.

And yet this will farther appear from the Order and Government of it. For if it had no need of publick Worſhip, Why are we ſo ſolemnly admitted into it, and excluded out of it? Why is it neceſſary for every one to be publickly baptized in order to be a Member of this Society? but that he may be known to have a Right to appear in its Aſſemblies to participate therein of the ſeveral Ordinances ſubſequent thereto. Why are ſuch of its Members as have behaved themſelves unworthily to be publickly excommunicated? but that they may be known to have no Right to thoſe Priviledges, and may be driven from our Aſſemblies when they preſume to come there. Theſe Things were altogether needleſs, which yet the Scriptures have directed, if a Man could be a true Member of the Chriſtian Church without attending on its publick Miniſtrations.

Again, why are Miniſters ordain'd publickly to officiate in this Church? and why are they called Biſhops or Overſeers to feed the Flock of Chriſt, and the Chriſtian People ſo deſcribed, if they are not obliged to aſſemble themſelves into a Flock, that they

may be the more commodiously administer'd unto? Why also was the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which every Christian is bound to receive, and was administer'd in the primitive Times as often as Divine Worship was celebrated, call'd by St. *Paul* the *Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ*, and attended with a *Feast*, if the Christian Worship was not to be a publick Act at which Numbers were to assist? Why was the first Day of the Week substituted by the Apostles in the Room of the Seventh? but that Divine Worship should be celebrated by Christians publickly and solemnly at a certain stated Time, as God had before appointed to the *Jews*? And why did they make use of particular Places on that Occasion, upper Rooms, Oratories, and the like at the first, and afterwards put themselves to the Expence of building sumptuous and magnificent Structures, call'd Churches, as soon as Providence enabled them, if it had not been their Duty solemnly to assemble for God's Worship? Why is the Church described as *a City set on an Hill*, and its Guides as *a Candle placed in a Candlestick to give Light to all that are in the House*, Mat. v. 14, 15. if it was design'd to be an invisible Society, and the Fellowship of it maintain'd by secret Acts done in a Corner? Why did our blessed Lord command all his Disciples to *let their Light shine before Men, that they might see their good Works, and glorify their Father which is in Heaven*, Mat. v. 16, if the Worship of God, wherein his Glory is so immediately concern'd, were to be a private and meer personal Matter? and what need had he to be

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ſo careful to prevent their being either afraid, or aſhamed of owning him to be their Lord, by telling them *that whoſoever ſhould confeſs him before Men, them would he confeſs before his Father which is in Heaven, but whoſoever ſhould deny him before Men, them would he deny before his Father which is in Heaven*, Mat. x. 32, 33. had it been an indifferent Thing to him, whether Men made publick Profeſſion of his Faith, or had it ſecretly to themſelves? Once more, why is it a Maxim among Chriſtians, and never diſputed till of late among ourſelves, that it is the Duty of the Civil Magiſtrate to ſupport and encourage the true Worſhip of God, if this is not to be a publick Thing? For 'tis impoſſible that he ſhould effectually extend his Care, or Orders to what Men do privately in their Cloſets.

THUS, I hope enough hath been ſaid to eſtabliſh the Duty we have been upon, beyond Contradiction. If I have been tedious in the Proof of a Thing ſo clear and obvious in itſelf, I muſt recurr to the Apology I made at the Beginning of this Diſcourſe, when I told you how faſhionable it is grown amongſt us of late Years, to diſuſe the publick Worſhip. I have, you ſee, ſuppoſed this neglect, with Regard to ſuch as have not entirely given up the Chriſtian Faith, to proceed from a Miſtake, as if the private Devotion of the Cloſet would do as well; but whether I am right in this Suppoſition or not, they themſelves, that are concerned in it, beſt know. I hope, for their Sakes, that I am; becauſe it is the moſt charitable Conſtruction that can be put upon their Conduct, and if

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any Excuſe were to be admitted in that Caſe, beſides want of Health to attend, or Capacity to improve by ſo doing, this ſurely is the beſt that could be offered.

I was unwilling to ſuppoſe of ſuch Perſons, that they had ſo loſt the Senſe of this Duty, as to neglect the ſtated Times of it both in Publick and Private: And that they did this to be more at Leiſure to mind their worldly Concerns, or elſe to divert themſelves with Company, or other Amuſements. I was unwilling I ſay, to ſuppoſe this of ſuch Perſons, becauſe of the uncharitableneſs of the Cenſure, where there is room to think that the Caſe may be otherwiſe, and becauſe wherever this is really the Caſe with them, I will venture to ſay, that they are condemned in their own Judgments, and have not the Hardineſs to avow their own Practice; whereas many, I fear, who have no Ill-will to Chriſtianity, are perſuaded, they may, at any Time, ſafely enough keep from Church, provided they employ themſelves the while in reading good Books, and meditating on good Subjects, and perhaps praying in their Cloſets. And it is to this ſort of Men, if any of them happen to be here, that I have all along more particularly addreſs'd myſelf, and whom I would entreat with the greateſt Seriouſneſs, to conſider and reflect upon what I have delivered.

For I cannot but hope, that if the Arguments I have uſed were rightly weighed, and the Hints I have here given, duly improved by them, they would no longer remain in thoſe unhappy Sentiments

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that at preſent miſlead them; they would no longer imagine, that God will accept private Devotions inſtead of publick Worſhip, eſpecially when one is offer'd in Slight and Contempt of the other, which is always the Caſe where Men have Opportunities for both, and yet confin'd themſelves to one. They will ſee no Reaſon indeed, from any Thing I have advanced, to abate their Zeal for private Devotion, each hath its Reaſon and Uſe, each hath its Times, and thoſe ſufficient too, for its Purpoſe; ſo that we have no need to encroach upon the Opportunities of the one, for the better Performance of the other; and methinks, if ſuch Neceſſity could be ſuppoſed, private Worſhip ſhould rather give way to publick, than publick to private; for that muſt needs be more pleaſing to God than this, as it is more honourable to be praiſed by a Multitude of devout Souls in a ſolemn Aſſembly, than in a Corner, where no Body ſees or hears us. The Prayers that are put up by a publick Miniſter, authorized by God for that Purpoſe, and wing'd with the ardent Deſires of a faithful Flock, ſeem to have the Advantage in point of Prevalence with God, over thoſe that are put up by ſingle Perſons, and ſupported only by their own private Fervours. And we may reaſonably expect a more plentiful effuſion of the Divine Grace and Spirit, while we are attending in the Congregation of the Saints upon God's immediate Appointments, than while we are ſerving Him in Secret (tho' ever ſo devoutly) at our own Pleaſure.

To ſuch Suggeſtions as theſe, if you pleaſe to add what you have often heard of the great Zeal

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and Affection which the primitive Christians had for God's publick Worship, what a mighty Priviledge they esteemed the Enjoyment of it to be, and how deplorable they thought their Case was, when for any Misdemeanour they were excluded from it, either wholly or in part; if you please to add this I say, nothing more I think need be urged to induce you to condemn your own Conduct; if you wilfully neglect, nay, if you do not with the greatest Pleasure and Gratitude lay hold on the Opportunities for it, which Providence doth so graciously and constantly afford you.

By this Reflection you will easily perceive how much the Case is altered, to the great Shame and Reproach of the present Age, wherein many Persons are so far from thinking it a great Happiness and Priviledge to have free Recourse to the publick Worship of the Church, that almost any Excuse is sufficient to keep them from it; so that they very rarely present themselves there: And others make it so slight a Matter to be deprived of that Priviledge, that by a total and affected Absence they excommunicate themselves; and so voluntarily bring on their own Heads that, which, in the purest Times of Christianity, was thought the heaviest Judgment in the World. And altho' this Case is in no Part of Christendom more common than among our selves, yet I cannot help declaring that, if possible, it is a greater Crime, and attended with more aggravating Circumstances of Guilt in this our Nation, at least in this Part of it, where the Evil I fear most abounds, than perhaps it would be in any

any other Place. I ſpeak this not only on account of the Orthodoxy, Purity and Edification of our Worſhip; but alſo of the many Opportunities and great Conveniencies, with which We are more particularly favoured.

THIS Remark naturally leads me to admoniſh you, to whom I am now ſpeaking, of the Duty which you owe to this Place, in which we are now aſſembled, and which hath with ſo much Care and Expence been provided for you, and made ſo convenient, I hope, for all the Purpoſes of Divine Worſhip, that you cannot reaſonably excuſe yourſelves, as formerly, from your Attendance here for want of Room, or any other Thing neceſſary to your joining in it. For, this being the Caſe, you cannot but conclude with me, that your Obligations in this Reſpect are riſen upon you, and that you cannot now neglect the publick Worſhip of God, but the Sin will be the greater in you; in Proportion as your Opportunities and Conveniencies for it are better than heretofore. In ſhort, it depends altogether upon the Uſe you ſhall henceforth make of this Houſe, whether the great Sums you have contributed to the Building of it, ſhall be a Sacrifice acceptable to the Lord, or a Reproach to yourſelves. The latter they will certainly be, if for want of a due Attendance here, and the proper Improvements that may be expected from it, you ſhould reap nothing from all this Expence but the Aggravation of your Impieties.

BUT Beloved, we hope better Things of you, tho' we thus ſpeak. We hope the Zeal you have already ſhewn for the Honour of God in building him an

Houſe will not grow cool now you come to behold the Beauty and Magnificence of it. We are inclined rather to believe that theſe agreeable Effects will enflame it the more; and that the Hearts of ſeveral heretofore untouch'd with a Senſe of God's Worſhip, will upon viewing what we have thus happily accompliſh'd, be ſtirr'd up to ſay with holy *David* in rapturous Admiration, *O how amiable are thy Dwellings O Lord of Hoſts. My Soul hath a Deſire and Longing to enter into the Courts of the Lord, my Heart and my Fleſh rejoice in the living God*, Pſal. lxxxiv. 1, 2.

We hope alſo that the Elegance and Decency which you ſee here, and is ſo becoming of the Houſe of God, and *the Place where his Honour dwelleth*, will conſtantly remind you of that Purity and Holineſs with which you yourſelves ought always to appear before him. I mean, that you preſent your *Bodies* here chaſte and undefiled with filthy and ſenſual Luſts; foraſmuch as the Scripture aſſures us that theſe alſo are the *Temples of the Holy Ghoſt*, and therefore, in reſpect to that glorious Inhabitant, ought to be carefully poſſeſs'd by us in all poſſible *Sanctification and Honour*: And above all, that you give all Diligence to prepare your *Hearts*, to wait upon him, that there be nothing foul and offenſive *there* to his pure Eyes; for as this Part of us is his moſt immediate Reſidence, ſo it is that which he chiefly reſpects in us; *Man looketh on the outward Appearance, but God ſeeth the Heart*. And I think, the Duty of our appearing before him, with all the Innocency and Sanctity we are capable of at-

attaining to, is not unfitly ſignify'd to us by the outward Ornaments and Beauty of his Temples.

THUS inſtructed and thus qualify'd to enter into this Houſe, there are no Bleſſings we want, which we may not confidently hope to obtain, if we devoutly frequent it. For this is the very End for which God hath order'd himſelf to be waited on and worſhip'd in all Places dedicated to him. *In all Places where I record my Name, I will come unto thee and I will bleſs thee*, Exod. xx. 24. Let us therefore conclude in the Words of *Solomon* on a like Occaſion. *And now O Lord, let I beſeech thee, thine Eyes be open, and let thine Ears be attent unto the Prayer that is made in this Place, and hear thou from Heaven, and do according to all that we* righteouſly *call unto thee for, and do thou O Lord God now ariſe into thy reſting Place, thou and the Ark of thy Strength. Let thy Prieſts O Lord God be cloath'd with Salvation, and let thy Saints rejoice in Goodneſs*, 2 Chron. Chap. vi.

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attaining to, is not unfitly fignify'd to us by the outward Ornaments and Beauty of his Temples.

Thus inftructed and thus qualify'd to enter into this Houſe, there are no Bleſſings we want, which we may not confidently hope to obtain, if we devoutly requeſt it. For this is the very End for which God hath order'd himſelf to be ſerved and worſhip'd in all Places dedicated to him. In all Places where I record my Name, I will come unto thee and I will bleſs thee, Exod. xx. 24. Let us therefore conclude in the Words of Solomon on a like Occaſion. And now O Lord, let I beſeech thee, thine Eyes be open, and let thine Ears be attent unto the Prayer that is made in this Place, and hearken from Heaven, and do according to all that earneſtly call unto thee for, and do thou O Lord God help me into thy reſting Place, thou and the Ark of thy Strength. Let thy Prieſts O Lord God be clothed with Salvation, and let thy Saints rejoice in Goodneſs, 2 Chron. Chap. vi.

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